

NEW
SERIES

SEPTEMBER

VOL.
25

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM
YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

a
Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

PART 142

PRICE
NINEPENCE.

1880.

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ADVERTISEMENTS are to be sent to ADAMS & FRANCIS, 59, Fleet Street.

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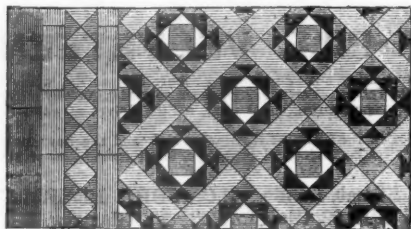
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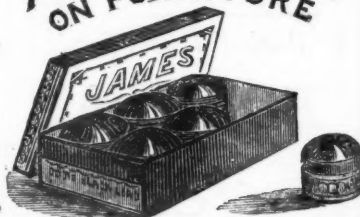
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"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 614. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1880.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

ASPHODEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "VIXEN," "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," ETC.

CHAPTER VI. "LOVE MAKETH ALL TO GONE MISWAY."

AUNT RHODA was not a person to be set at defiance, even by Daphne, who was by no means a tractable spirit. She had said, "Come to the Rectory," and had said it with such an air of offended dignity that Daphne felt she must obey, and promptly, lest a worse lecture should befall her. So directly after luncheon on the following day she changed her gown, and prepared herself for the distasteful visit. Madoline was going to drive to Warwick with her father, so Daphne would have to perform her penance alone.

It was a lovely afternoon in the first week of May, the air balmy and summer-like, the meadows looking their greenest before the golden glory of buttercup time. Yonder in the reedy hollows the first of the marsh marigolds were opening their yellow cups, and smiling up at the yellow sun. The walk to Arden Rectory was something over a mile, and it was as lovely a walk as anyone need care to take; through meadows, beside flowery hedgerows, with the river flowing near, but almost hidden by a thick screen of willows; and then by one of the most delightful lanes in the county, a green arcade of old elms, with here a spreading oak, and there a mountain-ash, to give variety to the foliage.

Daphne set out alone, as soon as she had seen the carriage drive away from the door, but she was not destined to go her way unaccompanied. Half way down the avenue she met Mr. Turchill, strolling at a

lazy pace, a cigar in his mouth, and a red setter of Irish pedigree at his heels.

At sight of Daphne he threw away his cigar, and took his hands out of his pockets.

"I was coming up to the Hill to ask somebody to play a game of billiards, and everybody seems going out," he said.

They had known him so long in an easy-going neighbourly way that he almost took rank as a relation. Daphne, who had spent so much of her life away from home, had naturally seen less of him than anybody else; but as she had been a child during the greater part of their acquaintance, he had fallen into the way of treating her as an elder brother might have done; and he had not yet become impressed with the dignity of her advancing years. For him she was still the Daphne he had romped with in the Christmas holidays, and whose very small pony it had been his particular care to get broken.

"I met Madoline and Sir Vernon going to Warwick. Why go to Warwick? What is there for anyone but a Cook's tourist to do in Warwick? But I thought you would be at home. You haven't a bad notion of billiards, and you might have helped a fellow to while away an afternoon."

"You are like the idle boy in the spelling-book story, wanting someone to play with you," said Daphne, laughing at him. He had turned, and was walking beside her, the docile setter following meekly, like a dog who felt that he was of no consequence in the world now that the days of sport were done.

"Well, the hunting's all over, don't you know, and there's no more shooting, and I never cared much for fishing, and I've got such a confoundedly clever bailiff that he

won't let me open my mouth on the farm. So the days do hang rather heavy on a fellow's hands."

"Why don't you take to Alpine climbing?" suggested Daphne. "I don't mean Mont Blanc—everybody does that—but the Matterhorn, or Monte Rosa, or something. If I were a young man I should amuse myself in that way."

"I don't set an exaggerated value on my life, but when I do make up my mind to throw it away, I think I'll do the thing more comfortably," replied Edgar Turchill. "Don't trouble yourself to suggest employment for me. I'm not complaining of my life. There's a good deal of loafing in it, but I rather like loafing, especially when I can loaf in pleasant company. Where are you going, and may I go with you?"

"I am going on a duty visit to Aunt Rhoda and my new uncle. Isn't it rather dreadful to have an uncle thrust upon one in that way?"

"Well," returned Edgar deliberately, "I must say if I had the choosing of my relations I should leave out the rector. But you needn't mind him. Practically he's no more to you than he was before he married your aunt."

"I don't know," said Daphne doubtfully. "He may take liberties. He was always a lecturing old thing, and he'll lecture ever so much more now that he's a relation."

"But you needn't stand his lecturing. Just tell him quietly that you don't hold with clerical interference in the affairs of the laity."

"He got me ready for my confirmation, and that gave him a kind of hold over me," said Daphne. "You see, he found out the depth of my ignorance."

"I'll wager he'd be ploughed in a divinity examination to-morrow," said Edgar. "These old heathens of village parsons got their degrees in a day when the dons were a set of sleepy-headed old duffers like themselves. But don't let's talk about him. What is Madoline going to do in Warwick?"

"She and papa are going to make some calls in the neighbourhood, and I believe she has a little shopping to do."

"Why didn't you go with them?"

"Papa does not like to have three people in the barouche. Besides, I had promised to call on my aunt. She talked to me quite awfully last night about my want of proper feeling in never having visited her in her new house."

"Why didn't you wait till she asked you

to dinner? They give capital dinners at the Rectory; but their feeds are few and far between. I don't want to say anything rude about your aunt, but she strikes me as a lady who has too keen an appreciation of the value of money to fritter it away upon other people."

"Why don't you say at once that she's horribly stingy?" said the outspoken Daphne. "I don't think she ever spent sixpence, except upon her own clothes, all the time she lived in my father's house, and I know she was always getting gowns and bonnets out of Madoline. I've seen her do it. But please don't let's talk of her any more. It's rather worse than talking of him. I shall have to kiss her, and call her dear aunt, presently, and I shall detest myself for being such a hypocrite."

They had gone out by the lodge-gate by this time, the lodge with its thatched roof, and dormer window, like a big eye looking out under a shaggy pent-house eyebrow; the lodge by which there grew one of those tall deodaras which were the chief glory of the grounds at South Hill. They crossed the high road, and entered the meadow-path which led towards Arden Rectory; and the setter finding himself at large in a field, frisked about a little, as if with a faint suspicion of partridges.

"Oh, by-the-bye," began Daphne, in quite a new tone, "now that we are alone, I want you to tell me all about Lina's engagement. Is he nice?"

Edgar Turchill's face clouded over so darkly that the look seemed a sufficient answer to her question.

"Oh, I see," she said. "You don't like him."

"I can't say that. He's an old acquaintance—a friend—a kind of family connection even, for his mother's mother was a Turchill. But, to be candid, I don't like the engagement."

"Why not, unless you know something against him?"

"I know nothing against him. He is a gentleman. He is ten times cleverer than I, ten times richer, a great deal handsomer—my superior in every way. I should be a mean cad if I couldn't acknowledge as much as that. But——"

"You think Lina ought not to have accepted him."

"I think the match in every way suitable, natural, inevitable. How could he help falling in love with her? Why should she refuse him?"

"You are talking in riddles," said Daphne. "You say it is a suitable match, and a minute ago you said you did not like the engagement."

"I say so still. Can't you imagine a reason for my feeling?"

Daphne contemplated him thoughtfully for a few moments as they walked on. His frank English face looked graver than she ever remembered to have seen it—grave to mournfulness.

"I am very sorry," she faltered. "I see. You were fond of her yourself. I am desperately sorry. I should have liked you ever so much better for a brother."

"Don't say that till you have seen Gerald. He has wonderful powers of fascination. He paints and poetises, and all that kind of thing, don't you know; the sort of thing that pleases women. He can't ride a little bit—no seat—no hands."

"How dreadful!" cried Daphne, aghast. "Does he tumble off?"

"I don't mean that. He can stick in his saddle somehow; and he hunts when he's at home in the season; but he can't ride."

"Oh," said Daphne, as if she were trying to understand this distinction.

"Yes, Daphne. I don't mind your knowing it—now it's all over and done with," pursued Edgar, glad to pour his griefs into a friendly ear. "You're my old playfellow—almost like a little sister—and I don't think you'll laugh at me, will you, dear?"

"Laugh at you!" cried Daphne. "If I do may I never be able to smile again."

"I asked your sister to marry me. I had gone on loving her for I don't know how long, before I could pluck up courage to ask the question. I was so afraid of being refused. And I knew if she would only say Yes, that my mother would be the proudest woman in the county, for she positively adores Madoline. And I knew Lina liked Hawksyard; and that was encouraging. So one day, about four years ago, I got desperate, and asked the plain question in a plain way. Heaven knows how much of my happiness hung on the answer; but I couldn't have screwed any poetry out of myself to save my life. I could only tell her the honest truth—that I loved her as well as man ever loved woman."

"Well?" asked Daphne.

"It was no use. She said No: so kindly, so sweetly, so affectionately—for she really likes me, you know, in a sisterly way—that she made me cry like a child. Yes, Daphne, I made a miserable ass of myself. She must have despised such unmanly weakness.

And then in a few minutes it was all over. All my hopes were extinguished, like a candle blown out by the wind, and all my future life was dark. And I had to go back and tell the poor mother that the daughter she wanted was never to come to Hawksyard."

"I am so sorry for you," faltered Daphne.

"Thank you, dear. I knew you would be sympathetic. The blow was a crusher, I assure you. I went away for a few months deer-stalking in the Highlands, but lying on a mountain side in a grey mist for hours on end, not daring to move an eyelash, gives a fellow too much time for thought. I was always thinking of Madoline, and my thoughts were just two hundred and fifty miles due south of the stag when he came across, so I generally shot wild, and felt myself altogether a failure. Then I tried a month in Normandy and Brittany with a knapsack, thinking I might walk down my trouble. But I found that tramping from one badly-drained town to another badly-drained town—all infected with garlic—and looking at churches I didn't particularly want to see, was a sham kind of consolation for a very real disappointment; so I made up my mind to come back to Hawksyard and live it down. And I have lived it down," concluded Edgar exultantly.

"You don't care for Madoline any longer?"

"Not care for her! I shall worship her as long as I have breath in my body. But I have resigned myself to the idea that somebody else is going to marry her—that the most I can ever be to her is a good, useful, humdrum kind of friend, who will be godfather to one of her boys by-and-by; ready to ride helter-skelter for the doctor if any of her children shows symptoms of measles or whooping-cough; glad to take dummy of an evening when she and her husband want to play whist; or to entertain the boys at Hawksyard for their summer holidays while she and he are enjoying a tête-à-tête ramble in the Engadine. That is the sort of man I shall be."

"How good you are!" said Daphne, slipping her hand through his arm with an affectionate impulse.

"Ah, my little Daphne, it will be your turn to fall in love some of these days; put it off as long as you can, dear, for there's more pain than pleasure in it at best." Daphne gave an involuntary sigh. "And then I hope you'll confide in me just as freely as I have confided in you. I may be useful as an adviser, you know, having had my own troubles."

"You could only advise me to be patient, and give up all hope," said Daphne, drawing her hand from his arm. "What would be the good of such advice? But I shall never trouble you. I am not going to fall in love—ever."

She gave the last word an almost angry emphasis.

"Poor little Daphne, as if you could know anything about it," exclaimed Edgar, smiling incredulously at her. "That kind of thing comes upon one unawares. You talk as if you could choose whether you would love or not—like Hercules between his two roads, deliberating whether he should go to the right or the left. Ah, my dear, when we come to that stage of our journey there is but one road for us: and whether it lead to the Garden of Eden or the Slough of Despond, we must travel over it."

"You are getting poetical," exclaimed Daphne scornfully; "I didn't know that was in your line. But please tell me about Gerald. I have never seen him, you know. He was always at Oxford, or roaming about the world somewhere, when I was at home for the holidays. I have been at home so little, you see," she interjected with a piteous air. "I used to hear a great deal about a very wonderful personage, enormously rich, fabulously clever, and accomplished and handsome; and I grew rather to hate him, as one is apt to hate such perfection; and then one day I got a letter from Lina—a letter brimming over with happiness—to say that she and this demigod were engaged to be married, but it was to be a long engagement, because the other demigod—my father—wished for delay. So you see I know very little about my future brother."

"You are sure to like him," said Edgar with a somewhat regretful air. "He has all the qualities which please women. Another man might be as handsome, or even handsomer, yet not half so sure of winning a woman's love. There is something languid, lackadaisical—poetical, I suppose Madoline would call it—in his appearance and manner which women admire."

"I hope he is not effeminate," exclaimed Daphne. "I hate a womanish man."

"No; I don't think anyone could call him effeminate; but he is dreamy, bookish, fond of lolling about under trees, smoking cigarettes and reading verses."

"I'm certain I shall detest him," said Daphne with conviction, "and it will be very dreadful, for I must pretend to like

him for Lina's sake. You must stand by me, Edgar, when he is at the Hill. You and I can chum together, and leave the lovers to spoon by themselves. Oh, by-the-bye, of course you haven't lived on the Avon all your life without being able to row a boat?"

"No; I can row pretty well."

"Then you must teach me, please. I am going to have a boat, my very own. It is being built for me. You'll teach me to row, won't you, Edgar?" she asked with a pleading smile.

"I shall be delighted."

"Thanks tremendously. That will be ever so much better than learning of Bink."

"Indeed! And who is Bink?" asked Edgar, somewhat dashed.

"One of the under gardeners. Such an honest creature, and devoted to me."

"I see; and your first idea was to have been taught by Bink?"

"If there had been no one else," she admitted apologetically. "You see, having ordered a boat, it is essential that I should learn to row."

"Naturally."

They had arrived at the last field by this time. The village lay before them in the sunlight: an old grey church in an old churchyard on the edge of the river, a cluster of half-timbered cottages, with walls of wattle and dab, a homestead dwarfed by rick-yard and barns, and finally the vicarage, a low many-gabled house, half-timbered, like the cottages, a regular sixteenth-century house, with clustered chimneys of massive ruddy-brown brickwork, finished by a stone coping, in which the martens had built from time immemorial.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to have you with me," said Daphne as they came near the stile. "It will take the edge off my visit."

"Oh, but I did not mean to go in with you. I only walked with you for the pleasure of being your escort."

"Nonsense; you are going in, and you are going to stay till I go back, and you are going back with me to dinner. I'm sure you must owe Aunt Rhoda a call. Just consider now if you don't."

Edgar, who had a guilty memory of being a guest at one of the rector's rare but admirable dinners, just five weeks ago, blushed as he admitted his indebtedness.

"I certainly haven't called since I dined there," he said, "but the fact is, I don't get on very fast with your aunt, although I've known her so long."

"Of course not. I never knew anyone who could get on with her, except Lina, and she's an angel."

They came to the stile, which was what the country people call a tumble-down stile, all the timbers of the gate sliding down with a clatter when a handle was moved, and leaving space for the pedestrian to step over. The Rectory gate stood before them, a low wide gate, standing open to admit the entrance of a carriage. The garden was lovely, even before the season of bedding-out plants and carpet horticulture. For the last twenty years the rector had annually imported a choice selection of Dutch bulbs, whereby his flower-beds and borders on this May afternoon were a blaze of colour—tulip, hyacinth, ranunculus, polyanthus—each and every flower that blooms in the sweet youth of the year: and as a background for the level lawn with its many flower-beds, there was a belt of such timber and an inner circle of such shrubs as are only to be found in a garden that has been cultivated and improved for a century or so. Copper beeches, Spanish chestnuts, curious specimens of the oak tribe, the feathery foliage of acacia and mountain-ash, the pink bloom of the wild plum, and the snowy clusters of the American crab, deodara, cypress, yew, and in the foreground arbutus and seringa, lilac, laburnum, guelder rose, with all the family of laurel, laurustinus, and bay; a shrubbery so exquisitely kept, that not a blighted branch or withered leaf was to be seen in the spacious circle which fenced and protected that smiling lawn from all the outer world.

The house was, in its way, as perfect as the garden. There were many rooms, but none large or lofty. The Rectory had all the shortcomings and all the fascinations of an old house; wide hearths and dog-stoves, high mantel-pieces, deep recessed casements, diamond panes, leaden lattices, massive roughly-hewn beams supporting the ceilings, a wide shallow staircase, rooms opening one out of another, irregular levels, dark oak floors, a little stained glass here and there—real old glass, of rich dark red, or sombre green, or deep dull topaz.

The house was delightfully furnished, though Mr. Ferrers had never taken any trouble about it. Many a collector, worn out before his time by the fever and anxiety of long summer afternoons at Christie's, would have envied Marmaduke Ferrers the treasures which had fallen to him without the trouble of collecting. Residuaries

legatees to all his aunts and uncles, he had taken to himself the things that were worth having among their goods and chattels, and had sold all the rubbish.

The aunts and uncles had been old-fashioned non-locomotive people, hoarding up and garnering the furniture of past generations. Thus had the rector acquired Chippendale chairs and tables, old Dutch tulip-wood cabinets and bureaux, Louis Quinze commodes, Elizabethan clocks, Derby and Worcester, Bow, Bristol, Leeds, and Swansea crockery, with a sprinkling of those dubious jugs and bowls that are generally fathered on Lowestoft. Past generations had amassed and hoarded in order that the rector might be rich in art treasures without ever putting his hand in his pocket. Furniture that had cost a few pounds when it was bought was now worth hundreds, and the rector had it all for nothing, just because he came of a selfish celibate race.

The Chippendale furniture, the Dutch marqueterie work, old china, and old plate had all been in Miss Lawford's mind when she took the rector in hand and brought him to see her fitness for his wife.

True that her home at South Hill was as elegant, and in all things as desirable: but there was a wide difference between living under the roof of her brother, more or less on sufferance, and being mistress of her own house. Thus the humbler charms of the Rectory impressed her more than the dignity of the Hill. Sir Vernon Lawford was not a pleasant man to whom to be beholden. His daughters were now grown up. Madoline was sovereign mistress of the house which must one day be her own: and Rhoda Lawford felt that to stay at the Hill would be to sink to the humdrum position of a maiden aunt, for whom nobody cared very much.

Mrs. Ferrers was sitting in a Japanese chair on the lawn, in front of the drawing-room windows, nursing a black and white Japanese pug, and rather yearning for some one from the outer world, even in that earthly paradise where the guelder roses were all in bloom and the air was heavy with the odour of hawthorn-blossom.

"At last!" she exclaimed, as Daphne and her companion made their timorous advance across the velvet turf, mown twice a week in the growing season. "You too, Mr. Turchill; I thought you were never coming to see me."

"After that delightful evening with the Mowbrays and the people from Liddington!

It was too ungrateful of me," said Edgar. "If you call me Mr. Turchill I shall think I am never to be forgiven."

"Well, then, it shall be Edgar, as it was in the old days," said Mrs. Ferrers, with a faint suspicion of sentiment.

There had been a time when it had seemed to her not altogether impossible that she should become Mrs. Turchill. Hawksyard Grange was such a delicious old place; and Edgar was her junior by only fourteen years.

"I don't want you to make ceremonious calls just because you happen to have dined here, but I want you to drop in often because you like us. I want you to bring me breathings of the outside world. A clergyman's life in a country parish is so narrow. I feel hourly becoming a vegetable."

Mrs. Ferrers looked complacently down at her tea-gown of soft creamy Indian silk, copiously trimmed with softer Breton lace, and felt that at least she was a very well-dressed vegetable. Knots of palest blue satin nestled here and there among the lace; a cluster of hot-house roses—large velvety yellow roses—reposed on Mrs. Ferrers's shoulder, and agreeably contrasted with her dark, smoothly-banded hair. She prided herself on the classic form of her small head, and the classic simplicity of her coiffure.

"I think we all belong, more or less, to the vegetable tribe about here," said Mr. Turchill. "There is something sleepy in the very air of our pastoral valleys. I sometimes long to get away to the stone-wall country yonder, on the Cotswolds, to breathe a freer, more wakeful air."

"I can't say that I languish for the Cotswolds," replied Mrs. Ferrers, "but I should very much like a fortnight in Mayfair. Do you know if your father and Madoline are going to London this season, Daphne?"

"I think not. Papa fancies himself not quite well enough for the fatigue of London, and Lina does not care about going."

It had been Sir Vernon's habit to take a furnished house at the West End for some part of May and June, in order to see all the picture-galleries, and hear all the operas that were worth being heard, and to do a little visiting among his very select circle of acquaintance. He was not a man who made new acquaintances if he could help it, or who went to people because they lived in big houses and gave big dinners. He was exclusive to a fault, detested crowds, and had a rooted convic-

tion that every new man was a swindler and destined to end his career in ignominious bankruptcy. It had gone hard with him to consent to his daughter's engagement with a man who on the father's side was a parvenu; but he had consoled himself as best he might with the idea of Lady Geraldine's blue blood, and Mr. Goring's very substantial fortune.

"And so you are no longer a school-girl, Daphne, and have come home for good," said Mrs. Ferrers, dropping her elegant society manner and putting on a sententious air, which Daphne knew too well. "I hope you are going to try to improve yourself—for what girls learn at school is a mere smattering—and that you are aware how much room there is for improvement—in your carriage, for instance."

"I haven't any carriage, aunt, but papa is going to let me keep a boat," said Daphne, who had been absently watching the little yellow butterflies skimming above the flame-coloured tulips.

"My dear, I am talking of your deportment. You are sitting most awkwardly at this moment, one shoulder at least three inches higher than the other."

"Don't worry about it, aunt," said Daphne indifferently; "perhaps it's a natural deformity."

"I hope not. I think it rests with yourself to become a very decent figure," replied Mrs. Ferrers, straightening her own slim waist. "Here comes your uncle, returning from his round of duty in time to enjoy his afternoon tea."

The rector drove up to the gate in a low park phaeton, drawn by a sleek bay cob; a cob too well fed and lazy to think of running away, but a little apt to become what the groom called "a bit above himself," and to prance and toss his head in an arrogant manner, or even to shy at a stray rabbit, as if he had never seen such a creature before, and hadn't the least idea what the apparition meant. The rector's round of duty had been a quiet drive through elm-shadowed lanes, and rustic occupation roads, with an occasional pull-up before the door of a cottage, or a farmhouse, where, without alighting, he would enquire in a fat pompous voice after the welfare, spiritual and temporal, of his parishioners, and then shedding on them the light of a benignant smile, or a few solemn words of clerical patronage, he would give the reins a gentle shake and drive off again. This kind of parochial visitation, lasting for about two hours, the

rector performed twice or three times a week, always selecting a fine afternoon. It kept him in the fresh air, gave him an appetite for his dinner, and maintained pleasant relations between the pastor and his flock.

Mr. Ferrers flung the reins to his groom, a man of middle age, in sober dark livery, and got himself ponderously out of his carriage on to the gravel drive. He was a large man, tall and broad, with a high bald head, red-brown eyes of the protuberant order, a florid complexion, pendulous cheeks and chin, and mutton-chop whiskers of a warm chestnut. He was a man whose appearance, even to the stranger, suggested a life devoted to dining; a man to whom dinner was the one abiding reality of life, the same yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow—a memory, an actuality, a hope. He was the man for whom asparagus and peas are forced into untimely perfection—the man who eats poached salmon in January, and gives a fabulous price for the first of the grouse—the man for whom green geese are roasted in June, and who requires immature turkeys to be fattened for him in October; who can enjoy oysters at fourpence a piece; who thinks ninety shillings a dozen a reasonable price for dry champagne, and would drive thirty miles to secure some of the late Colonel Somebody's famous East India sherry.

Rhoda had married the Reverend Marmaduke with her eyes fully opened to the materialistic side of his character. She knew that if she wanted to live happily with him and to exercise that gentle and imperceptible sway, which vulgar people call hen-pecking, she must make dinner the chief study of her life. So long as she gave full satisfaction upon this point; so long as she could maintain a table, in which the homely English virtue of substantial abundance was combined with the artistic variety of French cooking; so long as she anticipated the rector's fancies, and forestalled the seasons, she would be sure to please. But an hour's forgetfulness of his tastes or prejudices, a single failure, an experimental dish, would shatter for the time being the whole fabric of domestic bliss, and weaken her hold of the matrimonial sceptre. The rector's wife had considered all this before she took upon herself the responsibilities of married life. Supremely indifferent herself to the pleasures of the table, she had to devote one thoughtful hour of every day to the consideration of what her husband would like

to eat, drink, and avoid. She had to project her mind into the future to secure for him novelty of diet. Todd, the house-keeper, had ministered to him for many years, and knew all his tastes: but Mrs. Ferrers wanted to do better than Todd had done, and to prove to the rector that he had acted wisely in committing himself to the dulcet bondage of matrimony. She was a clever woman—not bookish or highly cultured—but skilled in all the small arts and devices of daily life; and so far she had succeeded admirably. The rector, granted the supreme indulgence of all his desires, was his wife's admiring slave. He flattered her, he deferred to her, he praised her, he boasted of her to all his acquaintance as the most perfect thing in wives, just as he boasted of the sleek bay as the paragon of cobs, and his garden as the archetype of gardens.

And now for the first time Daphne had to salute this great man in his new character of an uncle. She went up to him timidly; a graceful, gracious figure in a pale yellow batiste gown, a knot of straw-coloured Marguerites shining on her breast, her lovely liquid eyes darkened by the shadow of her Tuscan hat.

"How do you do—uncle," she said, holding out a slender hand, in a long loose Swedish glove.

The rector started, and stared at her dumbly; whether bewildered by so fair a vision, or taken aback by the unexpected assertion of kinsmanship, only he himself knew.

"Bless my soul!" he cried. "Is this Daphne? Why the child has grown out of all knowledge. How d'ye do, my dear? Very glad to see you. You'll stop to dinner, of course. You and Turchill. How d'ye do, Turchill?"

The rector had a troublesome trick of asking everybody who crossed his threshold in the afternoon to dinner. He had an abiding idea that his friends wanted to be fed; that they would rather dine with him than go home; and that if they refused, their refusal was mere modesty and self-denial, and ought not to be accepted. Vainly had Rhoda lectured her spouse upon this evil habit, vainly had she tried to demonstrate to him that an afternoon visit should be received as such, and need not degenerate into a dinner-party. The rector was incorrigible. Hospitality was his redeeming virtue.

"Thanks awfully," replied Daphne; "but I must go home to dinner. Papa

and Lina expect me. Of course Mr. Turchill can do as he likes."

"Then Turchill will stay," said the rector.

"My dear rector, you are very kind, but I must go home with Daphne. I brought her, don't you see, and I'm bound to take her back. There might be a bull or something."

"Do you think I am afraid of bulls," cried Daphne; "why I love the whole cow tribe. If I saw a bull in one of our meadows, I should walk up to him and make friends."

The rector surveyed the yellow damsel with an unctuous smile.

"It would be dangerous," he said in his fat voice, "if I were the bull."

"Why?"

"I should be tempted to imitate an animal famous in classic story, and swim the Avon with you on my back," replied the rector.

"Duke," said Mrs. Ferrers with her blandest smile, "don't you think you had better rest yourself in your cool study while we take our tea. I'm sure you must be tired after your long drive. These first warm days are so exhausting. I'll bring you your cup of tea."

"Don't trouble yourself, my love," replied the rector; "Daphne can wait upon me. Her legs are younger than yours."

This unflattering comparison, to say nothing of the vulgar allusion to "legs," was too much for Rhoda's carefully educated temper. She gave her Marmaduke a glance of undisguised displeasure.

"I am not so ancient or infirm as to find my duties irksome," she said severely; "I shall certainly bring you your tea."

The rector had a weakness about pretty girls. There was no harm in it. He had lived all his life in an atmosphere of beauty, and no scandal had ever arisen about peeress or peasant. He happened to possess an artistic appreciation of female loveliness, and he took no trouble to disguise the fact. Youth and beauty and freshness were to him as the very wine of life—second only to actual Cluquot, or Roederer, Clos Vougeot, or Marcobrunner. His wife was too well acquainted with this weakness. She had known it years before she had secured Marmaduke for her own; and she had flattered herself that she could cure him of this inclination to philander; but so far the curative process had been a failure.

But Marmaduke, though inclined to folly, was not rebellious. He loved a

gentle doze in the cool shade of his study, where there were old-fashioned easy-chairs of a shape more comfortable than has ever revealed itself to the mind of modern upholsterer. The brief slumber gave him strength to support the fatigue of dressing for dinner, for the Reverend Marmaduke was as careful of the outward man as of the inner, and had never been seen in slovenly attire, or with unshaven visage.

Mrs. Ferrers sank into her chair with a sigh of relief as the rector disappeared through the deep rustic porch. The irreproachable butler, who had grown grey in Mr. Ferrers's service, brought the tea-tray, with its Japanese cups and saucers. Edgar Turchill subsided upon a low rustic stool at Daphne's feet, just where his length of arm would enable him to wait upon the two ladies. They made a pretty domestic group: the westering sun shining upon them, the Japanese pug fawning at their feet, flowers and foliage surrounding them, birds singing, bees humming, cattle lowing in the neighbouring fields.

Edgar looked up admiringly at the bright young face above him: eyes so darkly luminous, a complexion of lilies and roses, that exquisite creamy whiteness which goes with pale auburn hair, that lovely varying bloom which seems a beauty of the mind rather than of the person, so subtly does it indicate every emotion and follow the phases of thought. Yes; the face was full of charm, though it was not the face of his dreams—not the face he had worshipped for years before he presumed to reveal his love for the owner. If a man cannot win the woman he loves it were better surely that he should teach himself to love one who seems more easily attainable. The bright particular star shines afar off in an inaccessible heaven; but lovely humanity is here at his side, smiling on him, ready to be wooed and won.

Edgar's reflections did not go quite so far as this, but he felt that he was spending his afternoon pleasantly, and he looked forward with complacency to the homeward walk through the meadows.

LAND AT RETAIL.

UNDER the heading of *Locked-up Land*,* an attempt has been made to lay before the readers of *ALL THE YEAR ROUND* the actual conditions under which by far the

* *ALL THE YEAR ROUND*, New Series, Vol. 24, pp. 539 and 558.

greater part of the land in England is held. It is now proposed to indicate in a rapid manner the remedies suggested by those who have specially studied the subject.

To begin with, it is necessary to have done with the futile methods of permissive registration which the genius of lawyers has interposed as stumbling-blocks in the path of land reform. All that was wanted to make the land laws of England absolutely perfect, held Lord Chancellor Wigsby, was to permit landholders to register their titles if they saw fit. Lord Chancellor Bagleigh thought that permissive laws were apt to be imperative, but that compulsory measures could hardly be resorted to at once. You could hardly make a man expose a weak title, and thus depreciate his own property; and on the other hand, an owner with a clear title did not want you at all. And, we were told, compulsory registration, and, indeed, compulsory laws of any kind, were foreign to the genius of the English people, who loved freedom, and—and the rest of it. To meddle with the sacred rights of landed property and proprietors was—ah!—was like getting between the tree and the bark, between husband and wife, between mother and child, and would never be endured by English people. It was all very well for foreigners with their outlandish ways; but it was un-English; it might do for the Saxons, but not for the Anglo-Saxons, and so forth.

Now it is a plain fact, worthy of being meditated upon, that the Anglo-Saxon, so far as England is concerned, has shown for several years past a distinct tendency towards what is called by its enemies coercive legislation. It has been acknowledged that the gospel of letting all things alone may be pushed too far, at least in an old country riddled with traditions and encumbered by laws and customs which sit on the present age like a suit of plate-armour on a rifleman. The rubbish of feudalism makes a mound like unto Old Sarum. Its active principle is dead. Whatever use it once had has passed away. The fierce strong life which palpitated on the windy height commanding the old Roman Road has long since died out. The strong hand of the oppressor is dust. Yet the outline of his work remains. The hill-fort of Sarum and the law of strict entail have both disappeared, but a green hill and a mass of fanciful legislation remain to show us what was once law and life in England.

When the first Reform Bill exploded

some of the superstitions of the past, and grassy mounds and stone walls no longer returned members to Parliament, the first blow was given to a rotten fabric. Vested rights were rudely overthrown, and timid elderly gentlemen foretold that only the ballot was required to complete the dissolution of society. The constitution of society, however, has proved very much tougher than the elderly gentlemen imagined, and the chaos predicted as the consequence of the removal of landmarks has not yet set in. Free-trade has doubled the commerce of this country by sweeping away a monopoly, which favoured only landholders by raising the rents without benefiting the actual cultivator. Thus far the spirit of modern legislation had been in the direction of removing the restrictions imposed on himself by the meddling legislator of the past. But that which may be called a new departure in law-making was taken when the old superstition against interference between husband and wife was pushed aside by the Married Woman's Property Act, and the relations of parent and child were set at naught by compulsory education. Just such an outcry was made by clergymen and lawyers against compulsory education as is now made against the abolition of the laws of settlement. The sacred institution of the family would be mined. Parents and children would be set against one another, just as Sydney Smith said the ballot would do in his ridiculous essay on that subject, now only interesting as showing how very much "Peter Pitt" was the rhetorical decorator of prejudice, and how far he was behind Grote and other real thinkers of his time. Revolutionary theories as to the devolution of the care of infants upon the State would, it was said, be justified by any such monstrous introduction as State-education. Yet all this has been done, and the country goes on better than before. The State has violated the sanctity of the family hearth. It has interposed its authority between mother and child. It has prescribed to a lesson and to an hour what a child of given age should know, and how many hours it may or may not work. The effect of this un-English way of going about things has been, in nine years, to double the teaching machinery of the country, and to treble its effective power. Against a million and a half scholars nine years ago, more than four millions now receive daily instruction. It is of no use to oppose sentimental considerations to facts of this kind, which only

require to be known to carry conviction with them.

The holiness of the domestic hearth having been invaded with success, it is but a small matter to interfere with the transfer of property. If it has been decided irrevocably that the parent is not always the best guardian for the child, it can hardly excite amazement that the ancient law or custom of settlement should be overturned. Lady Fitzgorgon and old Lord Stoneleigh may cry out as they please, but the destruction of the complicated machinery for tying up property will most assuredly be effected within a very few years. The most case-hardened lawyers, who would even now hold the State interference between parent and child as wholly unwarrantable, admit that land is the property of the State, in which no other person can do more than hold an estate—fee simple at the best. On all hands, even by the great Joshua Williams himself, the interest of the State in land is admitted to be superior to that of any other person. Fee simple, or “freehold,” as it is most commonly called, signifies that no person intervenes between the freeholder and the State. He is like the old feudal tenant-in-chief, who held of the king alone, without owing service or allegiance to any vassal or intermediate vassal of the prime suzerain. But many lands in England are what is called copyhold; an obsolete tenure which had better be swept away at once than allowed to wear itself out as it is now doing by a tardy and tortoiselike process. All authorities, from that legal luminary, Joshua Williams, to mere historians like Mr. Froude, and statesmen like Lord Sherbrooke, agree that the land itself belongs theoretically to the nation, the State, the people, or is “a kind of property in which the public must from its very nature have a kind of dormant joint interest with the proprietor.” This “dormant interest” is not often aroused. For instance, a large proprietor, from poverty, embarrassment, litigation, or natural perversity, may allow his estate to remain untilled, to become overrun with brambles and sow-thistles, and he may escape that interference which the State has a right to exercise. He has no right “to do as he likes with his own” according to the view of that foolish old Duke of Newcastle, whose ruined castle has recently been turned into the Nottingham Museum. He is only guaranteed by the State the enjoyment of his fee-simple so long as he does not exercise his privilege in a manner prejudicial to public policy. That

all this theory is based upon a sound substratum of practice is not disproved because the State does not interfere with a landowner who chooses to depopulate his property in order to turn it into a deer-forest, or who lets his farms go to wrack and ruin, rather than let them except under certain restrictions as to the sale of straw and the rotations of crops. He is allowed to do all this because State interference in such cases would be a graver evil than the waste of his estate, and a curtailment of liberty excites greater jealousy than any individual carelessness or perversity. But the instant the landowner proceeds to administer his property in such fashion as to cause loss or annoyance to his neighbours, the principle that the common good overrides the individual rights of proprietors is universally recognised.

But theories of ownership in land, and abstract speculations as to the rights which it confers, are by no means to the taste of Englishmen, and may safely be left to learned lawyers and advanced philosophers. It is far more important, at the present juncture, to consider the probable effect of free trade in land, brought about by the abolition of the present law of settlement and entail, and the cheapening of the transfer of real property. The opponents of change have, apart from sentimental considerations for old families, ancestral roof-trees, family vaults, and the rest of it, two stock arguments, each vigorous in its way. It is perhaps a little unfortunate that these arguments contradict each other completely, but they are none the less entitled to a fair hearing.

Let us first hear T. Plantagenet Belvoir Burkitt, J.P. Our friend Burkitt is the son of a successful man of business, who, while young and poor, married Plantagenet's mother, who was a laundrymaid. Plantagenet was originally christened Thomas, but the Thomas was dropped when old Burkitt, a few years after his first wife's death, married a gentlewoman of a decayed county family, and retired from the firm of Burkitt and Hareleigh, of the coolie trade. So decayed was the family of the second Mrs. Burkitt that her husband was forthwith charged with the maintenance of her brothers and sisters, who ate and drank at his expense, borrowed his money, and despised him; but, nevertheless, brought him into county society, and, backed by his money, got him into Parliament. Young Burkitt has studied the law,

and looks forward to a parliamentary career himself.

"Better distribution of property?" says Burkitt. "The facilitation of the purchase of real property will have exactly the opposite effect. There will be fewer owners of property than ever. In twenty years, or whatever limit you gentlemen are pleased to assign to the present state of things, all the land would be in the hands of a few great capitalists who would buy right and left for political reasons. Everybody who was hard up would be sold up, and you would abolish the owners who care about their land and their people, in favour of those who would not care a brass farthing for either one or the other." Burkitt junior says this with as grand an air as if his father's property had belonged to the Burkitts since the Conquest, instead of being a recent purchase from the utterly done-up Sangazures; and is much applauded by the young men who are doing their best to prevent old Burkitt's Lafitte, vintage of 1858, from being kept too long.

The opinion of Lord Bunnymore, whose great estate of Coneylands lies on the further side of the county, is directly opposed to that of Mr. Burkitt, whom he envies for his solvency and despises for his birth. For Lord Bunnymore's people are of a very old family, said to have descended from the De Warrennes of mediæval fame. The pedigree is, however, not quite so clear as might be wished, but the missing link has been admirably restored. There was only a gap of a couple of hundred years between the last assumed descendants of the De Warrennes and the first Sir John Rabbits or Rarebitts, who, going at an early age to London from the principality of Wales, became Lord Mayor, married an heiress of lands in the Ward of Portsoken, and subsequently bought from the Parliament the Gravelshire property of sundry malignants. So Lord Bunnymore is of very good family, indeed, and when he married Lady Susan Dedham, Lord Mortmain's eldest daughter, everybody said what a good match it was for her. Lord Bunnymore makes merry at the idea of abolishing settlement and entail. "By Jove!" he exclaims; "what a good thing it would be for Percy Nightshade, and Marmy Foxglove, and Totterdown, poor old devil! Why, when Totterdown married his daughter to that scoundrel Buffle, we all laughed over the wedding-favours. We knew Gunter would stand him for the wedding-breakfast; but where did he

get the ready money from to buy the white ribbons? Not in Mayford, for certain, for they had ruined all the tradespeople there, and I don't believe Howell and James or Lewis and Allenby would have let them have a yard of tape. Would not old Totterdown like a general selling up if he could only get a monkey for himself out of the scramble? But there is no such luck for him. Not yet, sir. Not in my time, I hope, will the land be cut up and divided among a lot of poor wretches—all starving together. Peasant proprietors, indeed! Pretty fellows to own anything who can't earn a living without stealing my game. Confound them. They live on me, sir. And you talk of abolishing the game laws! I know one 'industrial population,' as you call it, that won't thank you. There would be an army of drunken Othellos at the De Warrenne Arms, who would find their occupation gone. No, sir; property on your own showing requires capital to work it, and where will your peasant proprietors be in a few years? All starving together, and wishing you five fathoms under the Rialto."

To dispose of the Burkitt theory first, it is inevitable that the desire to possess land of good quality in manageable parcels is so great that it would pay better to sell encumbered estates to small proprietors than to great capitalists, and that the latter would in any case take care to get their money back by building or otherwise improving and developing the property. Furthermore it may be urged that English arable land is rapidly passing from the farm into the market-garden stage on one hand, and falling back to pasture land on the other. What, however, is most important is that the land, instead of remaining for a great part in the hands of impecunious owners, overwhelmed by fixed charges upon property of decreasing value, would pass to those capable of doing justice to it either by wholesale or retail.

The question of peasant proprietors—that is to say, of persons farming from five to fifty acres—has been far too hastily dismissed. It is roundly asserted that small ownership has proved a failure in France. This, however, may very fairly be doubted. The payment of the enormous war-tax without any apparent diminution of national prosperity has caused many thinking people to doubt whether France is not substantially a richer country than England. It is true that the number of very rich people—say

of those enjoying a larger income than ten thousand pounds a year—is very small in France as compared with England. But is this a subject for regret? Familiar knowledge of France and its inhabitants is apt to produce the contrary impression, that the wide distribution of wealth is at least as beneficial to a country as its accumulation in a few hands. Be this as it may, however, it would be ridiculous to contend that the average English agricultural labourer is as well off as the French peasant proprietor.

It is also easy to prove that the determination of husbandry by the subdivision of the land has been vastly overrated. Very few parts of England are better cultivated than the Isle of Axholme, which is almost entirely divided into small farms. The life of the small proprietors of Axholme has been called a hard one; but that is because little farmers are compared with large ones, which is like comparing a costermonger with a fruiterer. The true comparison is between a peasant proprietor and a farm labourer, a costermonger and a basket-woman—a small proprietor or capitalist, in short, and a mere worker without other capital than thews and sinews.

A more striking proof at once of the importance of free-trade in land, and of the possibility of working small farms at a profit, is provided by the Channel Islands. In Jersey there are many farms of ten acres farmed successfully, and an ample reply is furnished to the fashionable statement that now that steam is largely employed in agricultural work the small farmer will be at a greater disadvantage than heretofore. The difficulty is easily got over by a number of small proprietors arranging together among themselves, and hiring the machinery with its attendant engineer and stoker by turns. As an instance of the care with which all farming and dairy operations are performed may be cited the tethering of cattle. As a rule all the pretty little Alderney cows, as they are called, are tethered instead of being allowed to roam at large. A rope fastened round the horns and secured by an iron spike driven into the ground allows the cow to eat down the grass within a ten feet radius, after which she is removed to another spot. Not only is this practice a saving one as regards pasturage, but the cow is said to do better than when permitted to ramble about at will. The crops of vegetables grown in Jersey are magnificent.

Mr. Arthur Arnold speaks of five and a half tons of new potatoes, and of as much as twenty-two and a half tons of parsnips per acre. These extraordinary results are ascribed, not unnaturally, by Mr. Arnold to the keenness of the owner's eye. The farmer is working his own land for his own profit. In the same way the produce of the small farms of Belgium is infinitely heavier per acre than that of the large farms of La Hesbaie and Le Condroz.

A recent visit to Ireland has convinced Mr. J. H. Tuke that small farms of twenty or thirty acres can be successfully worked in Donegal. He gives names, places, size of farms, and conditions of purchase in the current number of the *Nineteenth Century*. The numerous small holdings concerning which he gives very interesting particulars, were mostly glebe-land farms recently sold to small proprietors by the Church Commissioners. While at Londonderry he visited the glebe-lands near Urney, three miles south of Strabane. The holdings vary from five to fifty acres, and were purchased from the Irish Temporalities Commission in 1875. The purchase money was high for Ireland—from twenty-three to twenty-five years' purchase on the rental—especially when the cost of tenant right is added. Experience on these small farms goes to prove that in Ireland it is not possible to make a living out of a six or ten acre farm, as it is in Jersey; but the difference of the value of land must be considered; for one acre in Jersey will buy twenty in Donegal. The holders of the twenty or thirty acre farms in the last-named county have done very well, and many of them have very little more money to pay before their farms are absolutely their own, "free of the landlords for ever," as they repeat with intense glee.

In Scotland, again, the general cry for large farms is met during these hard times with some curious rebutting evidence furnished to the writer by one of the largest landholders in Scotland. This nobleman, who attends most carefully to the management of his estate, has a rental exceeding sixty thousand pounds a year, and has so many small farmers on his estate that the average rental of his farms is something under fifteen pounds per annum. He tells me that his tenants have come up bravely during the hard times and not asked for any remission whatever. It is true that their green crops are not devoured by ground game, for his father gave them permission to slay

hares and rabbits several years ago, and also that the land, being in Banffshire, Morayshire, and Fifeshire, is of fair quality.

It is no part of my present purpose to uphold a general system of small farming against the conduct of that business on a larger scale. All I have sought rather to indicate than to demonstrate is that the insane terror about the land being "cut up" or "parcelled out among paupers," and therefore imperfectly cultivated, is purely visionary. Wherever the land should become divided into small holdings the letting of steam machinery would become a business of itself, and it is not certain that a farmer of twenty acres would be more dependent in that respect than one of two or three hundred, as the latter cannot afford to keep up a plant of agricultural machinery and a staff of engineers, as the matter stands, without letting them to his neighbours. It is probable that if the transfer of land were put on a rational footing there would be many more small farmers than at present, especially as market-garden produce appears likely to take the place of wheat; but it is not the sub-division of holdings that is now contended for, but the emancipation of the land from the trammels which have confined it and crippled its productive power so long.

A complete scheme for freeing the land was prepared several years ago at the request of the chairman of the Cobden Club by Mr. Arthur Arnold. As it has not since been superseded by any better plan I append it.

First,—The devolution of real property in cases of intestacy in the same manner which the law directs in regard to personal property.

Second,—The abolition of copyhold and customary tenures.

Third,—The establishment of a Landed Estates Court, for the disposal of encumbered settled property.

Fourth,—A completion of the Ordnance Survey of the United Kingdom upon a sufficient scale.

Fifth,—A system of registration of title, which shall be compulsory upon the sale of property, the fees upon registration—sufficient at least to defray all official expenses—being a percentage on the purchase-money; the same percentage for all sums. A certificate of title would be given free of all costs in respect of any freehold lands, of which the reputed

owner could prove undisturbed possession for thirty years. Any title could be registered in the Land Registry Office upon evidence of title for thirty years; the fees being the same as in case of sale, when registration would be compulsory.

Sixth,—That, preserving intact the power of owners of land to bequeath it undivided or in shares, no gift, or bequest or settlement of life estate in land, nor any trust establishing such an estate, should hereafter be lawful; the exceptions being in the case of trusts for the widow or the infant children (until they attain majority) of the testator, or for the benefit of a posthumous child.

It will be observed that the first and sixth clauses involve the complete abolition of the law of primogeniture, settlement, and entail. The scheme aims, in fact, with some exceptions, at the destruction of the mischievous power of giving "life estates," as it is called, which is simply another name for keeping the owner of property in tutelage. Except for the benefit of widows and infant children the whole system of trusts and settlements has become a nuisance. Like the old law of strict entail which it succeeded, it is merely a device for flattering the folly and vanity of man, who loves to fancy that when his hand is dead and cold his signature is yet a thing of power to fetter the living. How absolutely ridiculous this desire may become has been shown in the Thellusson case, and again to-day in the Havelock-Allan case. Of all vanities perhaps that expressed in the two wills referred to is the most childish, and that for which the least sympathy can be felt. Happily the time is approaching when this rubbish of feudalism, utterly foreign to the principle of the Roman law, will assuredly be swept away.

MY LITTLE TOUR IN WALES.

PART III.

WHY should a table-d'hôte, which, as I have always understood, is, on the other side of the silver streak, a lively institution enough, become, on this, so very grim and solemn a function? We sit down this evening five-and-twenty strong, and surely we can't all be suffering from the effects of such a catastrophe as that of this morning, which has added at least an additional shovel and tongs to the habitual poker in Adolphus's constitution, and her share in which Woffles is even now expiating—much to her own delight—by peremptory

banishment to the upper region, where I have just left her in the midst of an uproarious game of romps with a good-natured chambermaid. But surely all the chaperons of the party cannot be brooding in speechless dignity over the "most unfortunate" misfortunes of their chaperonees, or all the chaperonees be resenting in dignified speechlessness the disapproval of their chaperons. That the soup—not bad soup, by the way, if it were only a little warmer—should appear and disappear in solemn silence is, of course, only in accordance with the best traditions of the British dinner-table of whatever kind, even if it be not dictated, as it doubtless is, by the Great Ananke, or the Eternal Fitness of Things. But by the time we get to the scarlet beans and the mutton a good score people who have been all day engaged in exploring the beauties of about a quarter that number of square miles of scenery might have found common ground for some sort of remark. But three-fourths of us at least have not yet opened our mouths for any but exclusively commissariat purposes. The young couple on the opposite side—who do not at all require ticketing as bride and bridegroom—keep up a brisk conversation certainly between themselves, but it is of the most strictly private description. A highly benevolent-looking old gentleman is discussing with his rather pinched and watery wife what, from the fragments of the discourse which now and then reach me in the benevolent-looking old gentleman's rich and mellifluous tones, appears to be some fresh delinquency on the part of a certain Harry, whose general iniquities draw forth from the benevolent-looking old gentleman various comments of a by no means highly benevolent sound. And two young gentlemen in bicycle costume from Wolverhampton are narrating to each other, with much unction, sundry personal adventures. But with these exceptions, and an occasional whispered request for a tankard of bitter or a half-bottle of Number Seventeen, our forks alone—save in the case of one worthy citizen whose views as to peas are of a primitive nature—have grounds for suspecting that we have any mouths at all. Once a solemn gentleman with a "pinch-nose" and a high, a very high, forehead, over which a score or so of lonely hairs are carefully combed from either side, so far thaws as to enquire of another high-foreheaded gentleman in an eye-glass on the other side of the table which he con-

siders the best route for the mining district of South Wales. But the high-foreheaded gentleman with the eye-glass is not swift of speech, and one of the young bicyclers from Wolverhampton strikes rashly in with a friendly "Shrewsbury and Hereford, 8.45. Take y' about 'arf-a-dozen hours." Whereon the two high-foreheaded ones shut up as with a spring into a sterner silence than before. If I did not hate the very name of that impertinent young engineer—and the mere mention by the watery lady, as a diversion from the sore subject of Harry's misdeeds, of a desire to visit the famous Llangollen manufactory to replenish her stock of flannels, has already turned me crimson all over—I could really almost wish— But Mr. Flannels is no doubt half-way to London by this time. Not at all the young man, I should think, to linger a second day in so quiet a place as Llangollen.

We get up in a better humour next morning. Indeed, anyone who—let him wake up in the worst humour in the world—could possibly maintain it till breakfast-time in face of such a view as I have from my window, with the swollen Dee rushing and roaring below and the mist-wreaths floating up from the huge bare cliffs of Eglwyseg, and the ruin-crowned summit of Dinas Bran, and the golden sun-rays stealing up the valley and flooding leaf, and bough, and rock, and river, and forest with a glory of diamonds and gold, must have a better memory than I have, or poor Adolphus either. As for Dolly, he is quite radiant this morning, and actually carries me off for a half-mile walk to a wonderful "point of view" at the foot of the Barber's Hill, where, as our local guide informs us, "nearly all parties who proceed in this direction are overwhelmed with delight," and where, though we happily escape that ultimate catastrophe, we certainly enjoy as exquisite a view of the lovely valley of the Dee as one may well hope to get for an appetiser before breakfast. Still, even this, with the addition of the sweet mountain air, which even here comes sweeping softly down upon us from the top of the lofty Berwyn—three syllables, if you please—hardly seems to me fully to account for my severe brother-in-law's extreme radiancy this morning. And I am right. As we near the hotel on our return, who should come to meet us but Emma, with a demurely guilty air, as if she had been stealing the cream and I was the dairy-maid. And close behind her come Woffles and—Nurse Sanderson.

Well, it is no use being indignant, and after all Woffles is, as the young gentleman in the flannels poetically expresses it, rather a handful. For I was quite wrong. We have not got rid of that cheery young civil-engineer. Not by any means.

We are in climbing mood to-day; our appetites for mountain air and panoramic scenery, as well as for breakfast, thoroughly whetted by our little excursion to the foot of Barber's Hill. So we put on our stoutest boots and briefest skirts, and boldly disdaining the services of a guide to point the way to the ruined castle, a mile and a half off, which is fully visible from the time we start, set off with light hearts and a full stock of sandwiches and sketching materials for Dinas Bran.

Our road lies across the bridge, and just at the opposite end is an establishment for the dissemination of woolly dogs, wafery horses, and other juvenile luxuries, to which we have been attracted in passing by the sight of a stock of wondrous walking-sticks, neat knotted canes some four or five feet long, and shod with iron spikes, the very things, George vehemently protests, for— For driving cattle? strikes in a familiar voice. Certainly. Master Woffles is quite right. Get your price for them in Smithfield any day. Climbing hills? Yes. You might put them to that use meanwhile. But we are not thinking of going mountaineering now? Without a guide!

So eloquent does the young gentleman in the flannels wax over the dangers of the way: the paths that lead round unexpected corners over the shrub-hidden edge of unanticipated slate-quarries; the treacherous turf that thinly masks the hidden morass; the mountain mist that in a moment wraps the upper world in a more than midnight gloom, through which the uninstructed wayfarer may wander till exhaustion and hunger overpower him, that we really begin to think that, as that young gentleman himself assures us, our irrepressible young friend in the flannels must somehow have been specially commissioned to a sort of guardian angelship, or sweet little cherubship at the very least, on our behalf. If it were not for Edith and George, poor Emma would be for turning back at once, especially in the absence of Adolphus, who has been left at the hotel in blissful enjoyment of the Morning Post and of a shiny black leather bag of particularly choice official papers, which he has brought with him for more leisurely assimilation in the wilds.

But George especially has already been disappointed once to-day in the swollen and muddy state of the stream, which forbids any inaugurating of the new rod. And after all— So the young gentleman in the flannels carries the day, and in ten or more minutes we are in full climb, each armed with an iron-shod walking-cane of duly pantomimic proportions, long enough and strong enough, I trust, to support our adventurous steps over any Cambrian Mont Blanc or Matterhorn.

And they really are rather comfortable things when by-and-by, after half an hour or so of not very severe sauntering up a sloping meadow-path, and past a delicious creeper-covered cottage, and through a farm-yard, and along a deep narrow lane, scented with honeysuckle and flushed with delicate wild-rose, we find ourselves at last upon the short steep turf, where a whole flock of real Welsh mutton is clambering among the jutting rocks, and flourishing its long lean tails—distressingly long and lean just now, when they have newly emerged from the shearer's hands—and striking picturesque attitudes in all sorts of inaccessible places, where a stray blade of grass may be supposed to grow. It is certainly pleasant to be enabled to assert one's independence of the path and take short cuts over the slippery turf without fear of suddenly starting off on a premature return journey towards Llangollen after the unsophisticated usage of Greenwich Hill. None the less, by the way, for what seems to be a rather remarkable local variation of the law of hydrostatics. Commonly speaking, I believe, water is scientifically supposed to find its level by the shortest possible route; and certainly such representations as I have seen of mountain streams and rivulets have always depicted them as precipitating themselves downhill with a perfectly reckless straightforwardness of purpose. Here at Llangollen the tiny torrent—it is not above an inch or so deep—which trickles down the sides of Dinas Bran, finds its level after a much more philosophical, and, as I might say, nineteenth-century fashion. The road of course winds backwards and forwards after the easy-going custom of mountain roads not constructed under the immediate eye of ancient Roman generals, and the stream has quietly taken possession of it, winding backwards and forwards with as unconcerned a ripple as though the law of gravitation had never yet been translated into Welsh.

But I am bound to confess that, even when the beaten path has thus been abandoned, the ascent to Crow Castle does not present those Alpine difficulties which to the uninstructed mind would absolutely necessitate the employment of a guide. We reach the summit in due course, the last two or three hundred yards of the way being remarkable for about the finest show of foxgloves I ever remember to have seen; not hiding, as in my experience is their custom, in ditches and under bushes, but standing out boldly, each by himself, on the bare hill-side. And up above them on the old bare poll of the sugar-loaf-shaped hill stands still a fairly respectable remnant of the grand old castle of Dinas Bran. A fine old eagle's nest truly as ever justified a patriotic baron in transferring his allegiance, now to English Edward or Richard, now to Welsh Gruffydd—as our old friend King Griffith more characteristically spells himself, under the grim shadow of these thick black walls—without fear of forfeiture or attainder. Two thousand years, according to Llangollen reckoning, have those grim old walls frowned down upon the valley of the Dee; and I fancy something like a thousandth part that number of days energetically employed would put them in condition to regard with considerable philosophy any attempt at chastisement, unless it took the very inconsiderate shape of a battery of Armstrongs along the ridge of the Eglwyseg Rocks yonder, from which float to us across the deep sun-steeped valley peaceful tickings, as of a shopful of clocks, from the picks and hammers of the lime-quarriers busily employed in defacing the fine old weather-stained face of the crags.

But, however promptly an invading army might find its way down again, I do not think, as far as my own experience goes, that it would require any very highly organised corps of guides to pilot it up. And in that sense I express myself with some emphasis as, after duly admiring the distant view framed so artistically in the one still complete window, and have threaded the crumbling old vaulted corridor that once led to the vanished banquet-hall, and passed with dire awe into what without doubt may—or may not—have been once the deepest dungeon beneath the castle walls, and very nearly taken a sensational header into the happily choked-up well unexpectedly yawning in the middle of a steeply sloping path, we establish ourselves under the shady side of a black old one-eyed monster of a wall, and devote

ourselves to the consumption of the soothing sherry and the sustaining sandwich.

But at this moment our guide becomes suddenly alive to the necessity of making a pilgrimage to the quaint little wooden domicile in elaborate churchwarden's Gothic, where Mr. Samuel Jones and "his jolly wife," and his faithful dog reside—my little local guide-book informs me—all the year round, intent, like a miniature St. Bernard of the period, upon not only rescuing the erring traveller, but furnishing him with those bulkier forms of liquid refreshment which the silver flask of pedestrian life cannot supply.

Doubtless he thinks that in very gratitude for the foaming glass of ginger-beer which hisses so pleasantly down my parched throat, I shall find it impossible to pursue so painful a topic. Emma, I can see, is quite overcome by the delicate attention, and changes the subject abjectedly. But Margaret is made of sterner stuff, and the last ginger-beer cork has not yet finished its thoughtless flight before I demand sternly and categorically whether, when he offered his services as guide, the young gentleman in the flannels was aware that there was a broad and beaten path right to the very castle gates?

Bless his soul, no, he replies; how should he? Never was within a hundred miles of the place before in his life!

Is it a relief or a shock to our feelings when on our return home—by an entirely different route improvised by our self-constituted guide with all the calm assurance of a veteran inhabitant—we find that during our absence Adolphus has fraternised with the masculine chief of the party in whose company we yesterday lionised Plas Newydd, who turns out to be a distinguished member of the identical Department with which the bulk of his own most interesting official correspondence is carried on, and—the uncle of the young gentleman in the flannels? On the whole, perhaps, the former predominates. As for carrying out any portion of the remainder of our tour without the aid of that accomplished young gentleman's local experience, that is evidently not to be thought of. And, indeed, as he himself thoughtfully observes, that experience having been invented solely for our behoof we need surely have no scruple in availing ourselves of it. And under those circumstances it is clearly a gain to have our acquaintanceship put upon a regular footing. To the punctilious Adolphus, this

formal introduction to the well-intentioned young man, whose very irregular mode of rescuing Miss Woffles has placed him for the last two days in so distressingly false a position, is I am sure nothing less than an absolute boon. Even to me it is some sort of satisfaction to be able to abuse him by some more particular designation than that of the young gentleman in the flannels. And upon this point he forthwith enlightens us with characteristic impudence. "Answers to the name of Edward Emilius," he strikes in airily—as the great Sir Theophilus Tattenham introduces briefly "My nephew," as who should add, "and a nephew upon whom I do not dote with intensity." Yes; there's a Smith about somewhere, he believes; but as a rule he don't answer to that.

So under Edward Emilius's guidance we make our pilgrimage to the picturesque old ruins of Valle Crucis Abbey, where our archæological experiences are not a little expanded by our cicerone's translation of the somewhat dilapidated inscription over the fine old rose-window which surmounts the three lancet-shaped arches over the western archway, and which he stoutly maintains to be an announcement that "This work was accomplished by Abbot—Somebody—in the time of Adam." The worthy farmer whose well-earned slumbers are nightly celebrated in the cloisters once no doubt made vocal with the nasal nocturnes of the goodly colony of monks who now sleep more soundly still under the recently cleared pavement of the desecrated old church, is doubtful on the point; being inclined to think that the Adam in question was, as the learned folks tell him, no other than the abbot himself, and that that worthy ecclesiastic lived and built in the reign of our English Lionheart.

But Edward Emilius points to a quaint old broken-backed inscription which is even now legible on a dilapidated fragment of the very cloisters itself, and runs, "hie jacet Arvrvet," and asks triumphantly if he has ever read his Bible and what it was that rested upon Ararat!

But Adam or Noah, abbot or antediluvian, whoever built this dear old ruined abbey nestling down in its quiet sheltered valley, and even now in its utter dilapidation showing ample traces of its former magnificence, did a great work, and one which our architects of these more enlightened times do not quite appear to have the secret of imitating. No stint of stone or labour was there in those serious

old days. If my little local guide be right—and, pace Edward Emilius, I am inclined to put more confidence even in its archæological statements than in his—it seems in its downfall to have furnished no inconsiderable proportion of the materials for half the more modern churches in the neighbourhood. And even now its ruined arches and roofless aisles, as they lie quietly basking in the long streaks of placid sunlight that come streaming down through the fine old trees, might serve, were not this kind of Vandalism at least happily banished from among us, to supply columns and carvings, and benitiers, and encaustic tiles, and such-like architectural delicacies, for at least half-a-dozen more.

As for the Pillar of Eliseg, which gives its name to this Valley of the Cross, but which it appears was never a cross at all—except in the pious imagination of General Cromwell's military iconoclasts, who forthwith proceeded to tumble to the ground the quaint old monument of great-grand-filial affection reared in the neighbouring meadow by Concenn the son of Cateli to the memory of his stout old ancestor—I cannot say there is any very particular beauty about that even now that Mr. T. Lloyd, of Trevor Hall, has set what time has left of it carefully upon its poor old legs again. But its base makes a capital table round which to lounge as we discuss our midday sandwich; and as Edward Emilius is careful to propose in glowing terms the health of our hospitable host Mr. Eliseg and his family, I trust that the great-grand-filial feelings of Concenn the son of Cateli are not too seriously outraged by our impertinence.

Then after this little interlude of valley to take the stiffness out of our town-bred ankles after yesterday's scramble to the grim old war-eagle's eyrie on Dinas Bran, we brace ourselves for another little mountain excursion, and alpenstock in hand set out for the summit of the Geraint. A hundred feet higher this than our first venture, and though your Alpine Clubbist thinks scorn of anything that can be reckoned in less than five figures, let me tell him that a hundred feet are a hundred feet to limbs accustomed only to the considerate slope of Constitution Hill. There are lovely views to be caught from more than one point upon our upward journey, and it is remarkable what zeal we all show in pointing them out to each other, and how conscientiously we follow each change in the beautiful broad masses of light and shade, as some fresh

turn in the ever-winding path opens out a new perspective, or a passing cloud seems to change for the moment the whole contour of the valley that opens out gradually under our feet.

Our party has the usual tendency to disintegration. The elders—and Emma always goes in for being an elder when there are any other matrons in company, though she can be young enough still when we are alone together—make a solemn little band of four; the gentlemen no doubt discussing politics, and the ladies the last new thing in bonnets, or the next new audacity in servants, as usual. The two young spoony people adopt the earliest possible opportunity of taking an obviously wrong turning, and vanish promptly into space, deaf to the voice of the charmer, who, in the shape of Woffles, screams lustily after them till carried bodily off by Edith and the unengaged sister, who, in the absence of George, have struck up an alliance offensive and defensive for the rest of their natural life, or at all events for such portion of it as may be unoccupied by any deeper or newer devotion. George does not care for climbing a lot of stupid hills, and remains at home, deep in the mysteries of green-tails, and spider-flies, and great red spinners, and little pale blues, and whirling blues, and Coch-y-Bonddus—I should like to see a Coch-y-Bonddus—and all the rest of the mysterious means by which the wily trout is to be beguiled from the sparkling rush of the leaping stream, or the cool depths of his comfortable pool. For after this pleasant little spell of hot dry weather the waters are beginning to subside and the mud to settle down, and that joyous prospect of killing something of course obliterates all other considerations in the masculine mind. How it is that Mr. Edward Emilius has not been overcome by its fascinations I cannot think. But here he is striding up the Barber's Hill as calmly as though it were on his regular road to business, and no such word as trout or fly had ever found place in his vocabulary. And, everybody else being otherwise paired off, the honour of Mr. Edward Emilius's special companionship falls to me.

This arrangement, however, does not last long. In fact, the ascent of the Geraint, in spite of its supposed additional hundred feet above Dinas Bran, must somehow be a very much shorter affair than it is commonly set down as being, for we certainly cannot have been more than half an hour scrambling and panting and stopping to admire

the view, and capping verses from Byron and Wordsworth, and effecting an elaborate exchange of misinformation on all manner of points of botanical and geological and legendary lore, and conducting ourselves generally like a couple of promising young pupils from the County College at Colney Hatch, when, just as the traditional spot of the unlucky Barber-schoolmaster's execution comes most unexpectedly into sight, my attendant cavalier suddenly makes some remark about "the missis," and I find my lord has been quietly setting me down in his own mind—as I have no doubt he would call it—as Miss Woffles's nursery-governess!

For once in a way I am really grateful to Woffles. That she should have remained all this time without getting into any serious scrape is certainly rather a phenomenal state of things, and one hardly possible to be protracted much longer. But the moment actually selected for thrusting herself into a position of imminent peril is certainly most happily chosen, and the scream with which Edith announces that "my young charge," as Mr. Edward Emilius politely terms her, is hanging from a bush by her pinafore over the edge of a pleasant little perpendicular bank five-and-twenty feet or so in height, offers at once an escape and a safety-valve. Of course, it is Mr. Edward Emilius Smith who rescues Miss Woffles from her dangerous predicament, and on whose head are poured out the vials of that young lady's wrath for having, in so doing, "poilt" the unfortunate butterfly in pursuit of which she has been risking her valuable neck, and whose crumpled remains she indignantly holds out to her gasping aunt in proof of the charge.

And then comes Adolphus's turn. Poor Adolphus! What with Woffles, and what with other members of his family, apoplexy will certainly be his portion before ever this little tour in Wales comes to an end. It is not to be expected that I can go tête-à-tête about the hills all day long with a self-possessed young gentleman who has deliberately taken me for a nursery-governess! And as for shaking off Mr. Edward Emilius Smith by any process short of absolutely wedging myself inaccessibly in between Emma and Lady Tattenham, I know that most uncivil engineer much too well by this time to have any idea of that. So I wedge myself inaccessibly in between Emma and Lady Tattenham accordingly. And Emma, like

a model elder sister as she is, not only closes promptly in to protect my flank herself, but signals up the heavy batteries in the persons of Adolphus and Sir Theophilus Tattenham. Whereon Mr. Edward Smith, finding the position impregnable, accepts the situation, and avenges himself upon Adolphus.

Poor Adolphus! He cannot snub the man who has just this moment, for the second time, saved his daughter from premature obliteration. But as his tormentor glides lightly from the particular legend of the Barber-schoolmaster's execution on this spot to the kindred subject of what he calls "hanging matches" in general, and borrows his handkerchief for the purpose of showing him how to construct the true Calcraft knot, and urgently cautions him, should it ever be his fate to be operated upon, to insist upon a drop of at least six feet, that unhappy government official's face is a sight to see.

SET IN A SILVER SEA.

BY E. L. FARJEON.

CHAPTER XXXVI. HAROLD FINDS HIMSELF AN OUTCAST ON THE SILVER ISLE.

THE story was told. Without reservation, but with a delicacy which could not be surpassed, Harold related all that he knew of Clarice from the time of her betrayal. Frequently was he stopped in his recital by Margaret's tears and anguish, and his heart was racked by the sight of her suffering. He knew he could do nothing to lessen it, and he did not attempt by a word to exculpate Mauvain or himself from the wrong which lay at their door; but, even in the midst of her own grief, Margaret recognised that the man who stood before her with downcast head and eyes suffused with tears was more sinned against than sinning. Nothing yet had been said concerning Evangeline; her name had not been uttered during the interview. Harold seemed to be waiting for a cue from Margaret, and she did not give it; her mind was occupied only with the image of her beloved Clarice.

"There is still something more," she said; "does my sister live?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Harold, seeing an opportunity of introducing Evangeline's name. "A year after the departure of Ranf and Evangeline for the Silver Isle—"

He purposely paused, and made no effort

to complete the sentence, and Margaret, detecting a hidden meaning in his tone, gazed at him with a new and suddenly-awakened interest.

"Yes, yes—go on."

"A year after their departure your sister suddenly disappeared."

"You made an endeavour to find her! You did not leave her to a worse fate than had already befallen her!"

"I made every endeavour to discover her; for months I continued my enquiries—without success. I could learn nothing of her; and I believe I am correct in affirming that from that day Mauvain has never beheld her."

"Then she is dead!" cried Margaret. "No hope remains! Not in this world shall I be able to obtain her forgiveness for my cruel desertion of her."

Harold was silent; he had no consolation to offer. He waited till this paroxysm of grief had passed away, and then he said,

"You saw Evangeline when she first arrived upon this isle, a child."

"Yes; and my heart was drawn to her. I begged that she might be allowed to enter my home as one of my family, and the islanders consented to my so receiving her."

"A natural prompting; you know that Ranf is not her father."

"Ranf himself informed me that she was doubly orphaned."

"Had you no suspicion—it is but conjecture on my part; but it is in my mind as an impression impossible to efface—that she might be as near to you in blood as she is in affection?"

"Great Heaven!" cried Margaret, seeing what he wished to convey. "You confirm my own suspicions! Ah, if it be true, then is Evangeline doubly dear to me! But the proof—the proof!"

"The proof is in her face; by a hundred signs too difficult to describe, am I convinced of it—as I was when I first saw her, a child, in the old land. I am unable to assist you further; but there is one who may help you—the hunchback, who, in some strange way, appears to hold the threads of this mystery in his hands."

"I thank you—I thank you. Ranf is our true friend; I honour and love him. He bade me be patient and silent, and to trust in him. I have been neither patient nor silent. How was it possible, suffering as I have been suffering? At what are you looking?"

She moved to Harold's side by the

window, through which he was looking into the garden. By the soft light of the moon they saw Evangeline and Joseph Sylvester walking slowly to a wooden shed, on the roof of which some dove-cotes were built. The young man's arm was round the girl's waist, and she leant towards him tenderly, confidingly, her head almost touching his breast. A sweet and wistful smile hovered about Margaret's lips.

"There is consolation in those signs. They love each other, and I shall have my sister's child always with me. Heaven be thanked!" Already had she accepted it as a fact; Evangeline was hers, of her blood, and would soon be bound to her by even closer ties of love and kinship. "How wonderful are God's ways! It almost appears as if through all the years, and amidst our deep unhappiness and deeper wrong, He has been working to this end. See! Joseph is climbing the ladder to the pigeon-house. Then a message has come from Ranf! Yes; the bird is in his hand, and he is descending with it. I must go to them."

She was about to leave the room when she turned to Harold, and said, holding out her hand to him:

"I forgive you, and I believe in what you have told me. It was not in your power to help my beloved sister, or you would have done so—I am sure you would have done so."

"I would have laid down my life in her cause," said Harold, in a low sweet tone; "you honour and comfort me by allowing me to touch your hand."

"When you leave here to-night," said Margaret, "do you go back to Mauvain?"

"No," replied Harold; he had not told her the personal particulars of his interview with Mauvain, and she was not aware that Harold had renounced his friendship—"No; it may be that I shall never look upon his face again; it must be that he and I shall never more clasp hands in friendship."

"You have quarrelled with him?"

"I have broken with him for ever. When I learnt from his own lips—as I did for the first time to-day—the true particulars of the part he had played in your sister's life, I bade him farewell."

"Then you have no home?"

"Absolutely," said Harold, with a smile. "I shall have to-night to beg a shelter from the sky."

"No," said Margaret. "Stop with us—at least for a little while. I will explain to my husband and children as much

as is necessary to ensure you an honest welcome."

"I accept with gratitude. It will do me good to sleep for a night beneath your roof."

With a motion expressive of gratification at his acceptance of her hospitality, Margaret hastened from the room into the garden. Joseph and Evangeline were walking towards the house, but seeing Margaret, paused till she came up to them.

"See, mother," said Joseph; "a message from the mountains. Hold the bird while I unloosen the paper. There; the message is to you, mother. Read it."

Margaret moved to a patch of moonlight, and read:

"Ranf to Margaret Sylvester: The time has come. Last night, as you know, a ship anchored in the bay. To-morrow, at sunset, come you and your son Joseph, to the hut in the mountain, from which you will see a flag flying. Let no one else accompany you. I know that you have to-day visited Mauvain. Believe nothing that you have heard in that house; for their own purposes, and to gain their own ends, those men will lie and lie; but the more subtle villain of the two is Harold—as I shall prove to you to-morrow, not from the lips but by the words of your beloved sister Clarice. Let no person know what is in this paper, and bid your family not to retire to rest to-morrow night until you return from your visit to the mountain. You will have that to do upon your return, and that to see, which will add to the happiness of you and yours."

Margaret read this missive twice, the first time in bewilderment, the second with a clearer comprehension. The supreme moment of her life appeared to be approaching: the moment of which she had dreamed, which she had yearned for, hoped for, during all the years which had intervened since she lost her sister, but the issue of which was as completely hidden from her as the mystery of death itself. She accepted every word written by the hunchback as sincerest truth; there was in her mind neither doubt nor desire to question. "You will have that to do upon your return, and that to see, which will add to the happiness of you and yours." It would be so; every action of the hunchback's life proved that he would not utter what it was not in his power to accomplish. She looked up to the window of the room she had left, and saw Harold standing there with a tender smile upon his lips. "The

more subtle villain of the two is Harold—as I shall prove to you to-morrow, not from the lips but by the words of your beloved sister Clarice!" Instinctively she drew Evangeline to her side, and passed her arm around the girl, as she would have done in the days gone by around Clarice, to protect her from evil. In the light of this startling revelation Harold's face grew distorted in her eyes; the story he had told her sounded in her ears as a mockery; he was utterly, utterly false, and his very presence in her house was a danger to those she loved.

"Keep in the garden, Joseph," she said hurriedly; "do not come in for a little while."

She hastened into the house, and into the room in which she had left Harold. He advanced towards her with an expression of quick sympathy, almost of love, in his face. She pointed to the door.

"Go!" she said.

He caught his breath, and looked around as though another voice than hers had spoken.

"Do you not hear me?" she cried, her pulses throbbing with indignant passion. "Go! And never set foot within door of mine again. You are a false and shameless villain!"

He became grave instantly, and moved to the door. But before he left, he turned, and with a gentle pitying smile, said:

"It is useless to ask why you thrust me from your house?"

"Quite useless," she replied, in her sternest tone. "I shall pray that I may never look upon your face again!"

He made no further attempt to obtain an explanation, but passed from the room, saying:

"May happiness attend you and yours to the last days of your lives!"

The next moment he was gone.

"My words have come true," he said, with a sad whimsical light in his eyes. "I shall have to beg shelter from the sky. Be merciful, clouds, and do not weep as you pass over my bed of leaves! Let me think—let me think! I shall have time, being alone now, quite alone, and without a friend. And there is Eternity before me—time enough, indeed! To whom am I indebted for Margaret Sylvester's extraordinary change of feeling? Easily answered. She received a message from Ranf; my name was doubtless mentioned in it, and not in flattery. I noticed Margaret's stern look as she stood in the moonlight, and raised her eyes to the

window at which I was standing. Ranf is the friend I have to thank. I thank you, friend. But you and I have not done with each other; the last page of the book is not yet reached. Whence came that soft white bird, with its false message hidden under its tender wing? From the mountain, or from the hunchback's fairy-house of wonders? The latter is the nearest; it may not be time lost to wander in that direction. If Ranf be there, he shall give me satisfaction."

Towards Ranf's new house Harold therefore directed his steps, and sauntered listlessly around its ring of wild flowers, watching for a human sign.

"I will not enter like a thief," he thought; "if I can convey to the hunchback's ears that I am here, he will not flinch from a meeting."

For an hour and more he lingered, and noticed through the hedges which Ranf had formed that there were lights in some of the windows of the house. At length he fancied he heard the rustle of a dress, and he called aloud, at a venture:

"Bertha Christof!"

She stepped towards him, and replied:

"Who calls?"

"A friend. Let me speak with you; you have nothing to fear."

She approached with timid steps to within arm's-length of him, and he saw that his guess was correct when he called her name.

"Whom do you seek?"

"Ranf."

"He is not here; he is on the mountain."

"Will it be difficult to find him?"

"You will see a flag flying over his hut."

"I will seek him there—but not to-night. Do you remember my face, Bertha? I was in the court-house when Ranf was on his trial."

"Yes; I remember you."

"Bertha, this isle seems fatal to some. It condemned you to a life of loneliness; so am I condemned."

"Are you alone?"

"Utterly alone, and without a friend. So, for better fortune, shake hands with me."

She gave her hand, and he held it in his for a moment or two.

"And now, Bertha, I have a fancy. Bring me a flower from the grave of your child."

"Wait—wait!" she cried, and ran from

him, returning soon with a handful of flowers, which he placed in his bosom.

"I am not entirely forsaken," he murmured, as he walked back into the woods, and laid himself down to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVII. MARGARET RECEIVES THE RECORDS OF HAROLD'S GUILT.

"MOTHER," said Joseph, "Ranf's flag is flying from the mountain top. It is far to go. You will scarcely have strength enough to reach it."

"You do not know, my dear, of what I am capable. In the old world before your father and I met—and even afterwards for a time—I walked day after day, week after week, month after month, and was seldom more than healthfully fatigued. I have more than a woman's strength, my dear; and were I weaker than I am, the purpose for which we are now treading these strange paths for the first time, would not allow me to break down."

"You did not show me the message you received from Ranf."

"He desired me not to let any person see what he wrote. You will soon know all. Ranf is wise, and has been working for our happiness—for mine, and yours, and Evangeline's."

"For Evangeline's!" repeated Joseph Sylvester softly to himself, and his mother smiled tenderly as she heard the loving murmur.

"You love Evangeline, my boy."

"Yes, mother."

"We have seen the growth of this love, my dear, and it has made us glad. We knew that you would speak to us when you deemed it right. And Evangeline loves you, with a soul's pure love. It is the sweetest thing, my boy. But for your father's love, my life would have been very dark. He met me in the days of my despair, and brought light to my heart."

"You have seldom spoken of those old days, mother—and never freely. I have often been curious to hear. Sometimes I have asked father to tell me of them, and he has always replied: 'Your mother will speak to you of them, when the time serves; but never refer to them unless she encourages you, for in doing so you might bring to her the memory of a terrible grief.'"

"They have ever been tender of me; God will reward them."

"He has rewarded them; they are happy, as I am. You have made us so, mother."

"It has not been a merit on one side, dear; we have striven for each other. That is the truest happiness. When each strives for each, when each thinks for each, when each bears for each, then it is that love's sweet labour produces the best and brightest flowers. I have had both love and sorrow in my days. During my early girlhood I and your grandfather, who died long before you were born, and one who was very, very dear to me—my sister Clarice, Joseph—travelled about the small villages and towns of the world, working for our living, sometimes not knowing to-day where food was to come from to-morrow. Our wandering life was happy and beautiful, for love was with us, and lightened our toil. Then my father died, and being before his death misled as to the character of a man who professed to be our friend, left us to his guardianship and his care, until we arrived at an age when we should be able to protect ourselves from the snares which surround the innocent and pure in the world beyond the seas. Joseph, at that time, my heart, my life, my soul, was bound up in my sister Clarice, and when she was torn from me by treachery, I felt as if all hope and sweetness had fled for ever from the world. The errand we are on to-night concerns this dear and cherished being; a mystery is about to be unfolded, and I both yearn and dread to meet it. But Ranf's message should give me courage."

They walked on in silence until Joseph said, between his teeth:

"Those who wronged you, mother—do they live?"

"If they did, and you knew them, what would you do?"

"They should render an account to me," cried the young man; "they should not live to commit another wrong!"

"Heaven will punish them," said Margaret solemnly. "No evil deed is ever committed without bringing in its train its just reward. Bring to your mind the story connected with this very mountain. The crime, the suffering of a life-time, and then in the end the Divine anger which proclaimed that the sinner shall be judged hereafter! Joseph!" she cried in terror, "what is that moving yonder?"

Joseph looked in the direction of Margaret's outstretched arm. "I see nothing, mother. You have been frightened by a shadow."

But, indeed, it was the form of a man of which Margaret had caught a transient

glance—of a man weakened by fatigue and hunger, who was creeping slowly and wearily upwards. At the sound of Margaret's voice, he dropped behind a jutting rock, and remained concealed until they were out of sight.

"Upon my honour," he muttered, "I never knew the value of food till now. It is really necessary. I can sympathise with the famished creatures I have met with here and there in my way through life, and have generally passed by without a thought. Poor devils! I am in the same plight as yourselves. If some witch were to throw me a bone, I would throw myself on my knees in gratitude. Or a bottle of wine! That would be a more charitable gift. I have nothing to offer in return except the immortal part of myself, which, if I can arrive at its worth from the knowledge of the mortal part of myself, would not be reckoned a fair exchange for a meal. Harold, you are beginning to see something of life; all that is past has been comedy. This is grim tragedy. Well, it would have been a pity if you had passed away with what, I perceive now, has been but a limited experience. How weak I feel! I shall think myself fortunate if I reach the hunchback's gay flag with an hour's life in me. You have trained badly, Harold. Is it hunger that hurts you, my man? No, I swear it! If I could regain the esteem of a woman, I should be content to yield my life without a pang."

Margaret and Joseph continued their upward way until they arrived at Ranf's hut, where the hunchback awaited them.

"Welcome to my mountain home," he said. "You look around in wonder; there is no need to do so; it supplies all that I require, and that is enough for a man. See—in the roof are my birds, and here are goats that feed out of my hand. I am content; I have been able to do that upon which my heart was set. But it is not to talk of myself that I have asked you to take this toilsome journey. Joseph, leave us for awhile; I wished you to accompany your mother for her guidance and protection. What she learns from me is her secret, to be disclosed to others of her will, not of mine. Remain without until we call for you."

When Margaret and he were alone, Ranf said: "I have been setting my house in order. For years I have worked to a certain end, and to-night that end is reached. Margaret Sylvester, of all the inhabitants of the Silver Isle you were the

only one who, on my arrival here, appeared to regard me as a human creature, imbued with human feeling. On the first night of our meeting you offered me the hospitality of your house, and with your own hands you made me up a bed. But it was not that which won me; it was your likeness to a lady whom I met but once in the old world, and that under the strangest circumstances. I have no intention to occupy your time with a narration of my life and experiences; I have written them down in this packet, which I place now in your hands on this understanding: You will yourself read first what is herein written, and then, at your discretion, you will permit two other persons to read the record—Evangeline and another whom you will see before you sleep."

"Another?" said Margaret. "Whom?"

"You will know by your own prompting; it is not in accordance with my purpose to give you any other clue. I place the seal of secrecy upon the three persons to whom I have chosen to reveal much of my outer and something of my inner life, and I leave it to you to decide whether you will keep or burn the record, after you have made yourself, and those I have indicated, acquainted with its contents. But its fate and its revelations are of small consequence in comparison with this Book which I now place in your hands."

Margaret received the Book with trembling hands. A flood of tears gushed from her eyes, and with almost inarticulate cries she pressed it to her lips, and kissed it again and again.

"My sister's Bible!" she sobbed. "My sister's Bible! Oh, my sister! my wronged, my darling sister! It is as if you were standing before me, as in the olden time, and we were children again! Clarice! Clarice! forgive me for my desertion of you! If I had known!—if I had known——!"

"Margaret Sylvester," said the hunchback, in a tone as gentle as the tenderest-hearted woman could have used, "no human being has less cause for reproach than yourself. But your sufferings will soon be over; and when in a few hours you reflect that, in the hands of a mighty mysterious Power, I have been the means of restoring peace to your wounded heart, understand that the only motive which has urged me on, and which, when fortune strangely favoured me, helped me to success, is the love, the infinite love, that I bear for Evangeline. When you read

my record, you will better understand the meaning of the words I now utter. I found the Bible in my mother's hut, but it was by the merest accident—if you please to call it so—that I discovered the piteous Confession it cunningly concealed. These sheets were hidden between its pages. Do you recognise the writing?"

"My sister's!" cried Margaret, seizing Ranf's hand, and kissing it. "Oh, blessed chance that sent you to the Silver Isle!"

"There is more than chance in it. It is destiny—which has led to the events of this night. In this hut, upon this lonely mountain, untrodden for generations, until to-day, by any human foot but mine, your sister's Confession was discovered by me. I said in my message to you yesternight that I knew of your visit to Mauvain's house. I knew more—I knew that both Harold and Mauvain received you there. I am in ignorance of what passed between you, nor do I wish to be informed. It will not help us. As I have already said, I have worked to my end, and it is accomplished. But I said in the message conveyed by my white dove that, of the two, Harold was the more subtle villain, and that I would prove it to you by the words of your beloved sister. The proof is in your hand. It is my desire that you read her Confession before you depart from this hut to your happier home in the valley.

He sat a little apart from her whilst she read, and with a keen observant eye watched the varying emotions which her face betrayed. Sobs, infinite compassion, terrible indignation, all were there; and often she was so overcome, and so blinded by the tears, that for minutes she could not proceed. She heard every word she read; her sister's voice accompanied the written Confession of a heart's agony, and when at length the end was reached, she raised her white face to the sympathising face of Ranf, and whispered:

"The child! What became of my sister's child?"

"If Nature does not lie," replied the hunchback, "and if all proof and circumstance are not miraculously at fault, your sister's child lives in Evangeline."

"Oh, thou gracious God!" cried Margaret, sinking on her knees, and clasping her sister's Bible to her bosom; "I thank Thee for Thy wondrous mercy!"

With head bowed down to her breast, with her lips pressed to the blessed Book, she remained for some time in silent prayer, and Ranf did not disturb her.

She rose to her feet.

"That is all," said the hunchback. "Hasten your steps home, and the moment you reach it, you and all who are dear to you, proceed without delay to the house I have built, over the portal of which in golden letters is inscribed the word, 'Chrysanthos.' Do as I bid you, implicitly, and without question. You will obey me?"

"Yes. I should not deserve to live if I hesitated."

"You know now who it is who betrayed your sister. But for the evidence you hold in your hands, you might have found it difficult to believe that there existed on earth so plausible and smooth-tongued a villain. But the past is past. Let it die. A happy future is before you and yours."

"I must tell you," said Margaret. "Evangeline and Joseph are lovers."

"I know it. Go quickly. If you knew what I could tell you, you would not linger a moment."

"Will you not come with us?"

"No. I have work to do here. Good-night."

"Good-night, dearest friend. How can I thank you?"

Before he was aware of her intention, she pressed him in her arms, and kissed him on the lips. Then she and Joseph took their departure. He watched them as they descended the mountain, and then, with his hand upon his mouth and eyes, he entered his hut.

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